



Uniting for Safe Inclusive Community – Manchester

community@usicmanchester.org

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Katherine Bickford. I am a resident of Manchester and I am writing on behalf of Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community - Manchester (USIC) in support of SB284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS.

USIC is a grassroots organization consisting of diverse community members in the Manchester area. We advocate with community members impacted by systems of oppression for socially just policies at the local, state, and national levels. We understand the importance of SB284 because many of our members are either currently undocumented or were undocumented at some point in their lives, and they have been adversely impacted by the lack of access to health care resulting from their immigration status.

To be clear, we believe that expanding HUSKY access to **all** immigrants is the socially just thing to do and would ultimately benefit us all as a connected community, both from an ethical and a cost-perspective. We strongly support SB284 as a necessary next step to move us toward this goal, ensuring that at least **all children** in our state will have access to necessary healthcare, regardless of immigration status.

As an organization advocating with community members impacted by systems of oppression, we believe that healthcare is a human right, and that this alone is sufficient reason to pass SB284 and to ultimately expand Husky to cover all immigrants. From a practical perspective, we see many reasons to do so as well. We will discuss a few of these below.

We know that there are many costs associated with lack of access to healthcare, both for the individual and for our society. An uninsured individual is less likely to have access to a primary care physician. This makes it more likely that they will wait until something that could have been easily treated in a routine fashion has reached the level of an emergency, typically resulting in much more expensive care than it otherwise would have required. Uninsured individuals are also more likely to seek care for non-emergency conditions (such as common infections, viruses, etc.) in the Emergency Room, due to their lack of access to a primary care physician. We have seen the burdensome costs to our members of having to rely on emergency care instead of routine primary care, resulting in an inability to afford food or rent. We have helped them seek out assistance from friends and neighbors and navigate the systems of requesting financial assistance or a reduction to their bill. We also recognize that the costs of uncompensated care are passed on to the rest of us in various ways, for example in the guise of higher premiums and higher healthcare costs overall. Having access to Husky for all immigrant children would reduce the reliance on emergency care and reduce costs associated with uncompensated care in our state. Additionally, access to Husky for their children would allow families to avoid the burden of needing to choose between trying to pay for their children's healthcare and paying for other necessities like food and housing.

We have also seen the importance of access to mental health services in our undocumented community, especially in our families that have experienced domestic violence. Many undocumented individuals carry with them trauma from their experiences before coming to this country, much of which relates to why they made the difficult decision to leave their country of origin. Once here, additional stress is layered on top of this trauma simply because of the obstacles they are navigating in order to care and provide for their families. In situations of domestic violence, these stresses are exacerbated by the toxicity of familial dynamics, the trauma of abuse, and the necessity to navigate additional systems (such as the criminal justice system and DCF) as a survivor of abuse. The mental health needs of families in these circumstances are deep and complex and require access to timely and appropriate counseling, none

of which is possible without access to health insurance. Expanding access to Husky for all immigrant children, and ultimately to all immigrants, would help alleviate these stressors and provide for healthy children and healthy families.

Passing SB284 to expand Husky access to immigrant children is a necessary step to take at this point in time. It will help alleviate some of the tremendous burdens and stressors experienced by our members. It will help move our state toward reducing the overall cost of healthcare, reducing the number of people who are uninsured, and reducing the reliance on emergency care instead of primary care. It will ensure better access to mental health treatment, which can especially benefit survivors of domestic violence. Moving forward though, we know that healthy children need healthy families. Children are more likely to see a primary care physician and be able to access appropriate healthcare if their parents also have access to healthcare. This is why we would like to ask that you not only support the passage of SB284, but also create a plan to expand Husky to all immigrants, regardless of both age and status.

Thank you for your time,

Katherine Bickford

On Behalf of Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community - Manchester